

Steal This Hook!

The Inescapable Past

By Doug Beyer



If your players are the types who write out detailed histories of their characters, complete with childhood memories, tales of favorite relatives, and apprenticeship anecdotes, then great. You already have a character sheet full of hooks to steal for your campaign -- loved ones to get into trouble, old contacts to reintroduce, and other details to spin in dramatic directions (my **Eberron** group has been nice in this regard). But if they aren't the history-writing types, then today's Steal This Hook! is for you. It's full of ideas to connect the PCs to an *inescapable past* -- which both builds continuity and verisimilitude to the campaign, and lends to the players a sense of personal stake and urgency to motivate their play. If you're just starting a campaign, you could suggest ideas from here to plant juicy details in their backgrounds from the start. Steal away!

Letter from a Brother

The Fraternal Order of Uruvites -- that twelve-member club to which one of the PCs belonged during his school years -- was more an excuse to drink, laugh, and complain about the trials of young life than an "enlightened order of philosophically-minded neo-romantics," as their charter avowed. Still, the PC has fond memories of the elaborate regulations they established, the songs they composed at the Bluebuck Tavern, and the high-minded and thoroughly ridiculous oath they took never to abandon the principles of Uruv, an obscure, ancient essayist who wrote on subjects such as fraternal love and the pursuit of knowledge.

So what a surprise to hear from Olaf Egbees, an old friend and fellow Uruvite, so many years after they'd all gone their separate ways. The PC cracks open the letter and may read about . . .

. . . a hastily-called reunion back at the old Bluebuck? Perhaps a warning about a traveling investigative journalist sure to try to contact the PC about the Order? A plea for protection from some of the other members? A message from a white dragon scholar with an unexplained interest in the essayist Uruv? News of the sudden deaths of three of their members?

The Doomsooth Plaque

It all starts with an ornate, platinum plaque found on the back of a dead warforged.

A translation error from the plaque's draconic message leads to a rash announcement that a demonic force will fall on Breland in the coming weeks. A messenger is dispatched to find one of the PCs, whose mother, Aidin, was Breland's foremost scholar on planar conjunctions and daelkyr invasions -- before she disappeared nine years ago. The hero is forced to endure an excruciating walk down memory lane as the case of Aidin's disappearance is reopened, and the rest of the party becomes drawn in as well. The heroes discover that a number of Aidin's personal belongings were seized inappropriately after her disappearance, and signs point to the involvement of a reclusive baron.

The clock is ticking on the plaque's promise of demonic incursion -- or is it? Could the PCs decipher the plaque's

true meaning? Was the prophetic announcement a plot to divert public attention away from a more subtle evil? What killed the warforged, and why was it fitted with the plaque? What is the truth behind Aidin's disappearance, and could it be somehow related to the age of the plaque, the shadowy baron, and an unfinished research project on the nature of the daelkyr?

The Marked Mentor

A dragonmark can be a painful, confusing development in a young PC's life. It can mean a sudden burden of responsibility, a change of social status, strange and unfocused new powers, and of course physical disfigurement, any of which can traumatize a youth already bracing for onrushing adulthood.

That's why the arrival of Jiv d'Deneith was so comforting. The tall, grey-bearded Defenders Guild soldier with the booming laugh arrived when he heard the young PC had manifested a dragonmark, and regaled him or her with stories of his own painful and often hilarious transition into being dragonmarked. The old warrior stayed in town for several weeks, teaching the PC many things about the new mark, new responsibilities, and new gifts the PC now faced, and when he gave his farewell, he promised that their paths would cross again.

Well, they have, but not under good circumstances -- why? Is old Jiv under attack from a political assassination plot from inside Deneith? Is he dying and looking for old friends to go on one last adventure into Q'barra, where his brother disappeared? Does he need the PC's expertise in deciphering a sticky scroll that proves to be from his beholder nemesis?

Scar from a Scoundrel

The PC touches her neck and feels the scar under her fingers. As she and the other heroes descend, step by damp granite step, into the dungeon, memories of an ex-lover's promises, delivered in silver-tongued, Lhazaar-accented Riedran [{{link href="/default.asp?x=dnd/ebds/20050502a"}}](/default.asp?x=dnd/ebds/20050502a), well up. Why does she remember these words now? Not because the promises were broken long ago. Not because the scoundrel fled Zil authorities after holding her at knifepoint. But because the carvings on the dungeon entrance match that scoundrel's family crest.

As the party explores a dungeon on an item-recovery mission from their patron, the PC remembers that she has a past with an unscrupulous rogue whose family owns the property. Is this an opportunity for lover's revenge? A way to take from the man who took her heart, or to heal (or repay!) that scar she earned during his escape years ago? What item could they be searching for here in the scoundrel's family vaults? What crime had he done that caused the Zil gnomes to seek him out all those years ago, and what punitive fallout did the PC endure on his behalf? Might she find evidence of his current whereabouts among the dungeon's dangers?

Mini-Hooks

Here are some *inescapable past* mini-hooks to get your DM creativity started.

- A shifter PC's family feud with another shifter clan comes to light when a weretouched master declares war on the party.
- A PC's estranged twin catches up with the party -- and invites them to join his cult of the Mockery.
- A PC family's heirloom crysteel axe surfaces at a crime scene.
- When the skinless skull of a pre-Galifar king is discovered, the evidence suggests he was murdered by an advisor -- distantly related to one of the PCs.

- A con-artist changeling poses as a PC's sister, but doesn't realize he's posing as the sister who died of illness during the end of the Last War.
 - A distant uncle's will grants the PC a tract of land in the Shadow Marches.
 - A Blacksteel lizard man chieftain, killed by the PC's mentor, roams Khorvaire as a zombie until he can exact revenge on the PC himself.
 - The baby roc that the PC cared for as a child has returned as an adult.
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About the Author

Doug Beyer spent a lot of time getting philosophy degrees until he figured out that he should just move to Seattle and become a web developer for Wizards of the Coast. Now he spends his days working on games and his evenings playing them. Doug uses the time normally allotted for sleeping to lurk on the Wizards.com message boards as his alter ego, WotC_Doog.

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